



MEDICAL TOURISM AT THE STATE OF THESSALONIKI AND THE PERSPECTIVES

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I hereby declare that the work submitted is mine and that where I have made use of another's work, I have attributed the source(s) according to the Regulations set in the Student's Handbook.

Abstract

This dissertation was written as part of the MSc in Strategic Product Design at the International Hellenic University.

Health is an asset and is a priority for every human being, as it is the driving force in the life of man. In our days, it has acquired the status of a global variable that is associated with tourism, in order to create a new sector, that of Medical Tourism. During the last decade medical tourism has become a new trend in the healthcare industry, which is gaining popularity among highly industrialized countries.

The present thesis examines this phenomenon and refers to it, in order to identify and evaluate the role of medical tourism in Greek society , and more specifically at the state of Thessaloniki. The main purpose of the study is to outline and clearly illustrate the prospects for the development of medical tourism in the prosperity of a country and a region generally. Also, to highlight the comparative advantages that a country or a region has in terms of quality and price against other countries or areas.

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Keywords: medical tourism, Thessaloniki, healthcare industry

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Introduction

Medical tourism is a lucrative field of growth and economic prosperity, which is constantly and rapidly evolving on a global level. The high costs and large waiting lists in the homelands of patients, the development of new technologies and the existence of modern infrastructure in the destination countries, alongside, the cheap travel and the rapid development of online marketing, have played a very important role. The concept of medical tourism refers to the health services provided to patients in the destination country but at the same time combines entertainment and holidays in that country.

According to the above, this contributes positively to the economic prosperity of the country, reducing the economic crisis of the region in which it operates.

It is important to mention that this phenomenon predominated, mainly, in the Asian countries(India, Singapore, Thailand etc.), as well as, in the countries of the Western Atlantic areas (Brazil, Mexico, Costa Rica, Cuba etc.) . Today, however, there are many areas in Europe that are trying to enter the market, like Spain , Hungary and Greece (MEDIGO Blog, 2018).

It would be very positive, Greece, in the face of crisis, not to leave the opportunity to recover. This mean to grab the chance and gain more through medical tourism. The country is looking for ways to escape from this multidimensional economic crisis. During this effort, Greece is called upon to develop a new sustainable development model, which will be one of its escape routes, from its gloomy reality.

In Greece, the private sector has a lot of unskilled capacity, and the public sector has a very irrational allocation of potential. Greece seems to have the privilege to benefit a lot, as a service provider. The country can ,relatively, quickly and without significant new investments to provide internationally competitive health services.

With its mild atmosphere and medical staff who convey an overall notoriety for magnificence, it is no big surprise that Greece is setting up itself as a place for medical tourism. The division has solid potential for development because of utilizing the nation's current and world well known tourism framework as an aid.

Given the fact that only tourism contributes around 18 per cent to Greece's GDP yearly, the broadening of the area holds a considerable measure of guaranteeing the increase of the sector. As indicated by a 2016 report by Deloitte social insurance is one of the world's biggest enterprises at near 10 per cent of world GDP. This corresponds with an ascend in high-pay customers (those with earnings of above US\$25,000 every year) especially in Asia and the Middle East, in addition to longer futures.

The advantages of medical tourism for the economy are quite a few. It goes about as an income generator by drawing in remote guests, frequently inclining more towards the luxury market, who put cash in the local economy through restorative medicines, hotel rooms, nourishment utilization etc.

It additionally adds to the tourism business, creates medical framework as nations endeavor to stay in competition, and can turn around the cerebrum deplete event by urging specialists to stay in their nation of origin and practice their abilities there, a liven that Greece could positively do with having lost extensive swathes of qualified staff to abroad markets since the begin of the crisis.

The variables working to support Greece are numerous. Concerning security, Greece is viewed as a sheltered goal. The nation's scenes traverse shorelines with a hot, dry climate through to rich green woodlands high in the fresh oxygen of the mountains, implying that patients have a scope of decisions with regards to where to remain amid their recuperation period. The nation's rich characteristic abundance of remedial springs, copious daylight and a widely acclaimed nutrition vigorously based on olive oil, seafood, and products of the soil are special rewards to advance wellbeing.

With respect to the patients, they come looking for a scope of cures. Greece is a well known goal for dialysis patients, for instance, because of various dialysis centers spread over the country, incorporating in vacation hotspots. This implies cure can be non-intrusively joined with a vacation. Different methodology looked for by patients incorporate IVF, eye surgery, dental techniques, recovery and plastic surgery.

Giorgos Patoulis, the leader of the Athens Medical Association and Central Union of Municipalities of Greece, is dynamic in the advancement of the country for those looking for astounding restorative treatment at a reasonable cost. He as of late co-organized an occasion lasting two days in the United States advancing the nation as a medicinal tourism destination, and is associated with the arranging of a gathering to advance Greek medical tourism on Ithaca island on the 27th-28th of May.

Greece joins medical magnificence with great sanitation and the most current technology," he reveals to The National. "In the meantime, it is extraordinary compared to other vacation destinations on the planet with an astounding foundation that can address all issues."

The improvement of wellbeing tourism is a brilliant open door for the individuals who need to put resources into it, given the worldwide development in wellbeing tourism –

around the world, the medical tourism showcase is evaluated to be worth up to \$32 billion to \$55 billion every year. A 2013 gauge by the World Medical Tourism and the Global Healthcare Congress expressed that the aggregate market for medicinal tourism could achieve 16 per cent of the general earnings created by the tourism business by this year. It is a market that could offer a generous lift to the Greek economy with enough consideration and legitimate advancement.

The close geographical nature of Greece to the Middle East gives it an aggressive edge with regards to drawing in clients from this key market. "Our nations have incredible respective monetary and exchange relations, which can and ought to be additionally fortified through more participation in different fields, among which is medical tourism,"

Day by day associations and the nullification of visa necessity for natives of the UAE in the Schengen zone encourage guests from this market to look for medicines in Greece as indicated by Dr. Patoulis. Greece is one of 26 European states that have authoritatively canceled international IDs and some other kind of outskirts control at their common fringes

From the years of Hippocrates until this day what has not changed is the restorative advantages offered by the ocean and sun in Greece.

Lately, our nation has formed into a perfect destination for medicinal tourism because of the modernization of framework, fantastic inns and particularly in view of the universally prestigious restorative and nursing staff," he says. Be that as it may, as Dr Patoulis brings up, managing energy and pulling in speculation are basic keeping in mind the end goal to receive the full financial rewards.

Restorative tourism is a brilliant open door for Greece as it can be a vital main impetus for the improvement of the Greek economy. We have built up an imperative technique to advance it that will be propelled in the coming time frame. Be that as it may, the Greek state should exploit this open door and make the essential intercessions," Dr. Patoulis states.

The aim of this study is to identify, evaluate and access the evolution and possibilities that arise from medical tourism in Greece, and more specifically at the state of Thessaloniki.

Definitions

Tourism-Tourist

Since the beginning of the 20th century, many international organizations and tourism specialists have sought to define the concept of tourist and tourism. The most important of these are Glucks-mann (1929), de Magistris (1933) and Hunziker and Krapf (1942). According to the International Tourism Academy, tourism is defined as the total of human movements and the activities arising from them. Depending on the craving for escape, there is also the amount of tension that motivates them to travel. As a tourist, the person who moves for any reason, either from country to country or city to city, is defined for more than 24 hours and less than permanent (less than three years).

The motivation of tourists can be: a) holidays, rest, health, therapy, studies, sports, family reasons or conferences. One of the reasons for moving a tourist is to exclude those who have a direct monetary benefit. According to Hunziker and Krapf, as mentioned above, tourism is the set of activated relationships and events during the

movement and residence of individuals outside their usual residence, provided that both the movement and the stay they are not motivated to engage in any speculative activity. Many times the term "tourist" is confused with the term "excursionist", but this is wrong as the excursionist is a person who moves to another country or city different from that of his permanent residence but his stay there is for less than twenty-four hours (Cormany, & Baloglu, 2010).

Tourist product and services

As a product, we define this element offered on the market to satisfy human desires. We refer, individually, to material goods, desires and attractions. The tourist product, on the other hand, is a complex product because it is in the form of material products (goods such as the food and drink of the tourist) or intangible products (human services, transport from the place of residence to the final destination, hotel accommodation and various forms of entertainment). In general, the tourist product is a complex product, consisting of physical elements, services and facilities, which are available to satisfy the tastes of tourists and consumers (U.S. Renal Data System, 2001).

The satisfaction of tourist needs or desires requires the production of as many tourist products as possible. The Greek tourist product, with regard to its qualitative elements, is characterized by an offer based on the so-called "sun-sea" model, based on the geoclimatic characteristics of the country, as well as the historical, cultural and social characteristics. The above elements are one of the things that made it clear and helped it to be today the heavy industry of the country, but also those that are pushing

it to show signs of reduced competitiveness, intense seasonality and ease of substitution.

Contrary to the above, the tourist product offered by our country is offered by other Mediterranean countries (Turkey, Croatia) to more competitive prices in Greece, making it particularly easy to substitute and is internationally positioned as a product of summer holidays, but also affected by high seasonal phenomena. Special forms of tourism are those tourist products that are characterized by variety, are aimed at tourists of every economic opportunity and are dynamically adapted to its priorities and requirements, such as maritime, conference, exhibition, sports tourism and wellness tourism (Cormany, & Baloglu, 2010).

The aim of their development is to reduce or even eliminate seasonality, by extending the tourist season and qualitatively upgrading and enriching the offered tourist product. Next to the chapter, some of these special forms are summarized. Speaking of the concept of a tourist product, it is necessary to mention its life cycle, which includes five stages. The first stage is the emergence of the tourist product on the market. The promotion of potential buyers.

Then, follows the growth, the increase of its demand from the tourist market. Maturity is the third stage, which is the development of the tourist product on the market. In fact, by saying maturity, we mean the greater acceptance of the product by consumers. The next step is the saturation of the product on the market. This means the product has reached the highest point of sale and buyers have begun looking for something new and completely different. Finally, after the saturation follows the decline of the tourist product, increasingly losing consumer preference. The following

diagram shows the life cycle stages of the tourist product, according to the Butler model.

Tourist Enterprises

Tourist companies are legal or non-personally productive units in which one or more people make decisions about the production of tourist goods and services. These tourist business decisions determine which tourist goods and services will be produced on their behalf, in what quantities, qualities and varieties, what production process, what price will be sold, where the tourist enterprise will be located and several other smaller important problems of the tourist business.

As each business has as a direct purpose and guide to the various decisions it takes, to maximize the profit it seeks to achieve the greatest possible profit, and the greater the profit, the more it will be its survival and growth in a long-term perspective. In the large tourist businesses, which are not facing financial problems and which employ a large number of staff, the effort to maximize their profit is not only obvious but also planned. In small businesses, however, the attempt to maximize profit is anything but conscious. Despite the exceptions that may exist, the rule does not cease to apply: tourism businesses regardless of their financial status, organization, size, they seek in every way and with all the means at their disposal to maximize their profits.

And the decisions they make are based on this pursuit. The tourist business as an organizational entity of any kind owned by the hotel, the travel agency and generally the tourist unit can take various forms, namely the form of individual tourist or Tourist Company.

Definition and analysis of Medical tourism and Health-wellness.

Medical Tourism is the condition where people who live in one country, travel to another country to receive medical, dental and surgical care while at the same time receiving equal or greater care than they would have in their own country. The reasons of traveling are affordability, better access and higher level of quality of care. (medicaltourismassociation.com) (Deloitte, 2008).

Types of medical tourism

Necessary is a primary listing of the types of medical tourism.

- Ophthalmological tourism
- Orthopedically tourism
- Tourism to treat heart diseases
- Fertility tourism
- Tourism for mental health services
- Tourism of plastic surgery and other aesthetic interventions
- Tourism for diabetics and nephropathies
- Tourism for cancer patients
- Restoration and rehabilitation tourism

Also, basic components of medical tourism are: the length of stay in the country, the age of the patients and the number of the patient's attendants.

Health tourism, in the broadest sense of the term, is defined as the participation of tourists in private health care programs or health and hygiene programs, at

advantageous prices and in cooperation with the tourism industry. Health tourism is about preventing, maintaining, curing, recovering and restoring health with modern medical methods or natural methods, while combining relaxation and fun. The basic idea is the physical, mental and emotional rejuvenation of the person away from the daily routine in a beautiful relaxing environment (U.S. Renal Data System, 2001).

This is a form of tourism that can grow throughout the year and relates to the most valuable asset, health. In addition, people with disabilities and patients with chronic conditions, such as kidney patients, cardiopaths, cancer patients, are able to travel seamlessly to tourist destinations they want. At the beginning of its implementation, health tourism was mainly addressed to people who needed to make use of the waters of thermal springs in order to benefit from them and cure various diseases (Lunt, & Smith, & Exworthy, & Green, & Horsfall, & Mannion, 2011).

For this reason, it is considered to be the development of healing tourism. Formerly (1980), according to the definition of the International Association of Tourism Organizations, health tourism is characterized as "the provision of facilities by exploiting the natural resources of a country, especially mineral waters and the climate". Its main characteristics are considered, according to researchers, Staying outside the permanent residence.

Gradually, perceptions of health tourism are gradually changing and the services provided are specialized in modern care and care techniques and are expanding. In modern society it is observed that personal health and well-being are functions of prevention rather than disease healing. This means that special attention is now paid to the prevention of illness so that there is an improvement in the quality of life of the individual and hence healthy emotional, social, spiritual and physical well-being.

This view is based on the definition of the World Health Organization where it states that health consists of full physical, intellectual, social well-being and not just the absence of a disease. Therefore, the definition of health includes the concept of physical as well as mental health. Anxiety is a major factor that affects a person's mental health due to the great deal of work and lack of time in his daily life.

So, wanting to escape this vicious circle and fight against this negativity, chooses to go on vacation and combine various activities with which to prevent a variety of conditions if he combines them correctly in his spare time. As a result, high demand is presented for tourism services related to sports, hygiene and the environment, in connection with treatment and rejuvenation programs (Lunt, & Smith, & Exworthy, & Green, & Horsfall, & Mannion, 2011).

In Greece, in recent years, in collaboration with large travel agencies abroad, considerable efforts have been made to create modern centers for the provision of health and beauty services, mainly related to wellness tourism, thalassotherapy and spa centers, medical tourism, with emphasis in Accessible Tourism and Beauty Tourism, to promote these goals. A great part of our cultural heritage is Thermal tourism, as Greece is one of the richest countries in terms of natural resources, with about 850 natural sources recorded in the Greek territory with excellent water quality.

A country like Greece, with its unquestionable advantages in terms of safety and hygiene, with the mild climate, the diverse natural environment of exceptional beauty, the rich cultural and historical heritage and the famed healthy Mediterranean diet, is one of the most popular tourist destinations worldwide. In addition, the developed existing tourist infrastructure (after the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens), the improvement and extension of the road and rail network as well as the increase in air

services, the availability of specialized medical and nursing staff, the prohibitive cost of health services in other countries, and the legal impediments to restricting certain medical in vitro fertilization in the Catholic countries make Greece a particularly attractive destination for health.

At primary health care level, this form of tourism is targeted at tourists-patients in need of surgical interventions, as well as other specialized forms of treatment, with medical care and medication, while at secondary health care level, it is addressed to tourists who are provided with medical care in rehabilitation or in recovery units.

Basic areas of medical tourism are: plastic surgery, organ transplants, dentistry, ophthalmology, cardiology, orthopedics, traumatology, sport medicine, urology, dermatology, radiology, oncology, gynecology and assisted reproduction, geriatric and mental health. Medical Tourism, in addition to purely medical services, includes transportation, information, guided tours, restaurants and accommodation in 4 and 5 star hotels.

Greece has all the necessary conditions for the development of quality Health Tourism, combining the wonderful Mediterranean environment with natural wealth, cultural and historical heritage, tradition of healthy eating, mild climate and world-renowned medical staff. In particular, we can say that health tourism basically consists of two parts: 1) the part of the treatment, which is based on medical methods in the context of a therapeutic dimension of health, such as healing and climatotherapy. The healing methods are based on the use of substances as they come from nature. 2) the section aimed at regaining the good physical condition of the organism and generally in revitalizing and maintaining the health of the individual.

Follow-up is done either by medical methods or by methods parallel to medicine, such as thalassotherapy, phytotherapy, aesthetics and dietary.

Provision of services in medical tourism

The definition "medical tourism" denotes two categories of services:

1. Managing medical needs for visitors located in a foreign country for a holiday trip, or for a business trip, or for temporary installation, includes emergency health issues (eg heart attack) or regular health needs for years diseases (eg hemodialysis of nephropathies).

2. "Elective medical tourism "is the kind of tourism that the patient chooses to travel to receive a particular medicine service, motivated by factors such as: the cost of the service, the quality of service and the overall healthcare, the waiting time in the country of origin for the provision similar service and the opportunity to combine medical care with entertainment /travel.

For the first category of services the most important groups of patients with chronic diseases are:

- Kidneys
- Cancer patients
- Cardiopathics
- People with haematological diseases
- Older people requiring systematic medicine and pharmacovigilance

For medical by choice tourists, the most common services are:

- Plastic / aesthetic surgery
- Dentistry
- Ophthalmology
- Artificial insemination
- Cardiology / cardiac surgery
- Orthopedic therapy and rehabilitation
- Cancer treatment
- Organ transplants

Medical tourism as defined here, does not include services such as spa, thermal baths, centers slimming, which are rather part of the wider term "health tourism "or "wellness" (Ikkos, 2002).

Tourism in Greece

Alternative forms of tourism in Greece

Tourism has now been recognized as the largest and fastest growing sector in the world economy, contributing to the economic development of the countries and the well-being of the citizens. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) forecasts, cross-border tourist travel by 2020 will exceed 1.5 billion, while new consumer preferences and the ever-increasing demands of the modern traveler for comfort and quality require rapid adaptation tourist product and other forms. Thus, in recent years, with the change of lifestyle and the elimination of distances, new services have been created for alternative forms of tourism, including Tourism of Health. The distinction of tourism into categories has emerged from the factors that

distinguish it. Indicatively, the main forms of tourism are summarized below (U.S. Renal Data System, 2001).

Conference tourism

Convention tourism is its form, which includes all kinds of organized events, such as professional conferences or meetings, with a large or small number of participations, at local and non-local level. There are already small, medium and large conference centers (autonomously or in hotels) in the major cities and the most popular islands (Athens, Thessaloniki, Crete, Corfu, Rhodes) and many large, high-class hotels with conference facilities that compete well with the big hotels of Europe both in terms of infrastructure and level of service provision.

The advantages that make Greece "attractive" as a conference destination are: Ideal climatic conditions allow conference participants to combine business and pleasure. Short distances give participants the opportunity to enjoy natural beauties and admire the unique sights scattered all over the country. Her cultural heritage - is the element that differentiates the country and consequently its tourist-congress product compared to competing countries It is ranked among the cheapest countries in Europe. Its gastronomic tradition. Safety In addition to the human potential of tourist companies - experienced professional conference organizers, who have successfully organized a large number of international conferences and can implement any kind of event, ensuring its perfect conduct.

Religious tourism

Religious tourism is the form of tourism that concerns people who visit religious destinations either in their country of permanent residence or in foreign countries. The reasons why this form of tourism has developed are reasons of worship and faith, for which they also participate in various religious events or ceremonies. An important reason why believers travel to religious destinations is the fulfillment of a vow. The duration of this form of tourism is relatively limited, an average of two to three days. It is remarkable that this type of tourism does not require a specific infrastructure.

Incentive tourism

Incentive Tourism, a new form of tourism that grows at a fast pace. Large industrial units, which aim to increase the productivity of their employees, offer them group inclusive tours, usually abroad. This form of tourism had made its first appearance in the early 1960s in the United States. ¹⁴ The main feature of incentive tourism is the limited travel time (3-4 days on average). Emphasis is given on the choice of destination by the tour operator, since the place to choose should be special and not necessarily known (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2010).

Rural tourism

Rural tourism is a mild form of sustainable tourism development and multi-activity in rural areas, which, as it stands, refers to outdoor recreation and tourism activities that are developed in rural areas and are part of the rural environment and rural life. In particular, it refers to forms of tourist activities that are organized organically and harmoniously in the rural area and include various tourist activities which are

complementary or do not conflict with other activities, such as economic and social ones, which characterize the rural area (CBO, 2010).

According to international practical experience, rural tourism is distinguished in two basic forms: (a) In that it covers the reception and hospitality of tourists on farms where the guests participate in the life of farmers and in rural activities in general. This form of rural tourism is more widely known as a farmhouse holiday. (b) In the case of the creation of tourist accommodation and rented rooms in small settlements, not necessarily of a rural nature, and the hospitality of tourists usually with the "bed and breakfast" system.

The development of rural tourism in any rural area requires the creation of the appropriate infrastructure to allow for the development of related activities, such as interior design and room equipment intended for renting, opening roads or improving the existing road network; catering and recreation areas, making use of the tourist natural resources of the area (Ikkos, 2002).

Sports tourism

Athletic tourism has as its main motive the sport. In this form of tourism, sport belongs to employment during holidays, along with other basic tourism activities. It is a prerequisite for the tourist destination to have the right sports facilities on the part of the hotel, as well as the availability of appropriately trained staff (Lunt, & Smith, &Exworthy, & Green, & Horsfall, & Mannion, 2011).

Elderly tourism

Elderly tourism is an alternative form of tourism, which we could say is directly related to health tourism. People in the elderly tend to travel more and more. Typically, they are those who have plenty of free time, stable income, and a higher index of deposits due to mentality and lifestyle. The main advantage of this form of tourism is that there is no need for special infrastructure to accommodate them (Deloitte, 2008).

Health tourism

Health tourism - healing tourism, is also the form of tourism, which has created the motivation for doing this work. Health tourism is tourism during which tourists participate in health programs or programs related to Health. An alternative form of health tourism is healing tourism, which refers to the relaxation and treatment of chronic diseases with the help of thermal springs (Ikkos, 2002).

Alternative tourism consequences

Social consequences

Most of the social impacts of alternative tourism are:

- Tourists come in contact with the customs and lifestyle of the destination they are visiting. They learn the language of the particular place and in this way the mutual respect between the tourist and the local population increases.
- Alternative tourism can help preserve traditional occupations that might have disappeared. In addition, it can contribute to the revival of customs, thus providing

life prospects for young people in rural areas. With the revival of cultural events, there is a strong participation of local residents and tourists, giving the visitor the feeling that he is an active part of the event and not just a spectator.

- Alternative tourism creates the encouragement and economic impetus of cultural activities such as traditional dances, music, theater and local festivals. This way the cultural heritage is preserved.
- It also contributes to the development and maintenance of the secondary sector through the promotion of local handicraft and cottage products, ie the production of traditional products such as ceramics, textiles, embroidery and jewelry which are sold to tourists as souvenirs.

Environmental consequences

Tourism and the environment are interlinked. The philosophy of alternative tourism is to protect the environment and to associate the tourist with nature. Modern tourists have become demanding and ask for high quality environments and are willing to pay high sums to get it. In Crete, there is a high quality environment, both in the countryside and in mountain areas, where traditional economic activities have not been greatly distorted. So there are prospects for attracting alternative tourists.

Also, the demands of the modern tourist for energy and water are high, that is, natural resources are consumed to provide heat, air conditioning, power and drinking water. In the case of alternative tourism the problem is not so intense. Alternative tourism businesses are used to conservatively using resource resources by consuming lower amounts of energy or using alternative forms such as wind or solar (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2010).

Sustainable use of land, ie the application of environmentally friendly farming methods such as organic farming, are used by agro-tourism holdings. In this way, the environment is protected and upgraded, as environmental problems such as the destruction of fauna and flora, pollution of water and the formation of toxic substances in food and water causing serious effects on the heart (Caballero-Danell, &Mugomba, 2006).

It can also help preserve monuments and historical sites, as they are a major attraction for tourists. This means protecting, preserving and restoring them to the benefit of society. The money raised from museums, archaeological sites and national parks will help to cover the costs of their maintenance (MEDIGO Blog, 2018).

Economic consequences

Since alternative tourism develops in areas where economic activity is limited and tourist demand for holidays has increased, alternative tourism can lead to a better distribution of employment and change the labor market in rural areas altogether. The most important economic impact is that (Caballero-Danell, &Mugomba, 2006).

Jobs created in alternative tourism create new opportunities for employment not only in tourism, but also in various other sectors, such as agriculture and livestock farming. This will result in alternative tourism leading to the restraint of indigenous peoples and the revitalization of inland areas. This is because alternative tourism workers do not need to have specialized knowledge and thus allow unskilled people, who are often part of the rural population, to work (Cormany, &Baloglu, 2010).

Alternative tourism contributes to the development of local society by offering economic growth by increasing the production of traditional products. Businesses for

alternative tourism are family-run, so there is less money leaking. Alternative type businesses are consuming locally produced products. The tourist has the opportunity to get acquainted with the products produced by the area he visits and to look for them when he returns home, with the result that exports are increasing. The products produced bring higher incomes to the locals as they are sold directly to the consumer, without the intermediation of third parties (Caballero-Danell, & Mugomba, 2006).

The implementation of alternative tourism in Greece

Alternative tourism is the one that undoubtedly suits our country. Greece has ideal conditions for the emergence of alternative tourism, because its natural environment is characterized by excellent variety and beauty, the main occupation of its inhabitants is agriculture, its cultural heritage is particularly important and its cuisine is one of the best of the world. Already, many forms of alternative tourism are being developed today, such as one-day visits to archaeological sites, traditional villages to multi-day excursions to nature and "adventure" tours, and there are ecologically-based hotels with organic gardens and bird shelters as well as many rural accommodation in villages. Several efforts have been made to develop alternative tourism in the past, such as that of Milia, which was awarded in 2003 by the Scottish International Organization during the global eco-tourism competition. Undoubtedly, the diversity and uniqueness of Greece is a powerful asset that if used appropriately for the development of alternative tourism can yield a lot (Deloitte, 2008).

Medical Tourism in Greece

Also in Greece there is a growing interest in the tourism of cosmetic aesthetics, although it seems that this sector is still at an early stage. Certain companies specializing in the provision of health and beauty services already engage with major travel agencies to attract tourists, offering complementary cosmetic aesthetic services. Some of these services are plastic and aesthetic surgery, aesthetic dentistry and various kinds of facial and body rejuvenation treatments. It is separated from the tourism industry, but also from state health policy. Since product prices vary considerably, it requires additional insurance coverage while providing specialized training and advice on various health issues (Lunt, & Smith, &Exworthy, & Green, & Horsfall, & Mannion, 2011).

Historical review

The term "health tourism" has appeared on the market since people began to look for destinations outside the Western world in order to obtain cheaper therapies, but consistent with (in parallel with time) the international quality standards. There are recorded historical data for German travel agencies that prompted Germans to seek relaxed holidays in neighboring countries such as Hungary. Various terms are used for his description, such as Medical Tourism, Spa Tourism and Healing Tourism (MEDIGO Blog, 2018).

Description of health tourism in Greek reality

The most attractive country in Europe and one of the most promising markets for Medical Tourism internationally is Greece, according to the figures presented by

Professor of Economics Nikos Avlona, at a two-day seminar organized in Chicago by the US. KEDE with the Medical Association Athens, stressing that by 2025 there will be a 25% increase in medical tourism internationally. According to the figures presented by the speakers, the global turnover of the world medical tourism market is over \$ 100 billion annually (tanea.gr, 2017).

Greece has the best natural advantage for a person seeking to solve a health problem. The sun, the sea, the fragrances of nature, create the ideal environment.

The specialization of doctors, private structures and thermal springs in Greece can become a pole of attraction for those who want to combine the solution of a medical issue with holidays. The high quality that was offered at low cost to all Greeks and to citizens of other countries where particular health services are offered at high cost. In some countries, the cost of certain medical operations, such as assisted reproduction, arthroplasty and dental implantation, is even more than 5 times the cost of Greek specialized centers of the private sector (Patoulis, 2017).

Health tourism facilities and infrastructure in Greece

Existing health structures with the possibility of medical tourism

Greece can relatively, quickly and without significant new investments to provide internationally competitive services to the followings:

Hemodialysis: There is good geographical coverage from public hospitals, but it will be needed special regulation and organization in order to be offered to tourists those services. Private centers cover Athens-Thessaloniki but from tourist areas only Crete

and Rhodes. They already offer services to tourists, and this segment of the market can be expanded relatively easily.

Recovery - Rehabilitation: There is a great centralization of private centers in Macedonia and Thessaly, which have not been sufficiently exploited. They have extremely high-level infrastructure, special-advanced technology- equipment and are staffed by excellent scientific staff. They are unique in the in the Balkan area and rare for Europe. In terms of quality, there are similar in Germany and Switzerland, but they are much more expensive. Therefore, it is possible to create an important pole rehabilitation tourism, especially in central and northern Greece.

Fertility: Greece has favorable legislation compared to other European countries, and has already begun to grow "reproductive tourism". The (private) centers are located in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patra and Crete. Specialized therapies in Tertiary Hospitals: Private tertiary hospitals are concentrated in Athens and Thessaloniki. The public, are more scattered in terms of infrastructure, but not by view of specialists. Only the University Hospitals (Patras, Heraklion, Ioannina, Larissa, Alexandroupoli) have doctors in the region that could serve medical tourism for tertiary treatment. For the private sector, the issue is an appropriate international networking and viewing.

For the public sector, important institutional and organizational needs are required changes, but also investments to upgrade the infrastructure (building, hotel and medical equipment) in order to become credible and then competitive at international level. Possibly this can be done for certain units by hiring infrastructure to individuals (Initiatives to develop medical tourism,2012).

Because health tourism is a broader form of tourism that includes Healing and Spa tourism, but also other forms, such as wellness tourism and the tourism of various

forms of physical therapy, health tourism facilities should consist of the most diverse facilities of every kind, depending on the health programs in which tourists participate. Greek tourism, especially tourist real estate, has turned to the development of health tourism with the creation of Health Tourism Centers, supported by five-star hotels and 27 other tourist facilities such as spa, thermal baths, rehabilitation centers, special clinics and beauty and wellness centers (Deloitte, 2008).

The ambition of the specialists of this particular market is to get Greece out of the tourist model of the last 50 years and to create a complete package of services combining travel and recreation with the restoration of a health problem. There will be integrated packages of health and holiday tourism and will create small and lucrative programs. This was said by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Tourism Development at the Real Estate and Development conference.

The new model, however, implies the development of new real estate projects in the field of tourism, and it is expected that strong alliances of important business groups active on the one hand in the health sector will be created, and on the other hand, the tourism real estate market, and especially the development of high-service . According to the institutional framework, Health Tourism Centers can be divided into the following categories: 1. Centers for the provision of psychological support services and assistance for the reintegration of individuals, 2. Centers for the treatment of chronic diseases, such as kidney patients, 3. Centers for specialized medical services, surgical procedures (Caballero-Danell, & Mugomba, 2006).

Our country has high-quality medical and valued surgeons who could be the best "advertisers" of Greek tourism, 4. Centers for the provision of rehabilitation services for traumatized and disabled people, 5. Cosmetic Medicine Centers. (Here, the main

target is thousands of women and men, and Greece only with "natural spas", that is, thermal springs can become the number one choice for foreigners), 6. Centers of assisted reproduction, 7. Special units for dental services. The difference with a hospital, however, is that all these centers will also provide tourist services. That is, the patient-tourist will come to Greece and will be included in the special health units, which will have five stars hotels and any infrastructure and services that the visitor requires, depending on the purpose of his trip. These units will have specialized medical staff and staff for hotel support and will be supervised and supervised by both the Greek National Tourism Organization and the Ministry of Health (Deloitte, 2008).

Greece does not yet have such centers because there is no institutional framework. With the submission of the bill, a number of outstanding issues such as who will have the right to invest in this sector, how to make a real estate and health merger, if they will be subsidized by the development law, depending on the region, should be solved. Hospitalization - tourism will be covered by insurance funds, etc. In any case it is addressed to patients - visitors who have the financial capacity to make such a trip and to combine the rehabilitation of a health problem with tourism in Greece. As calculated, only in the EU, one in 10 patients is looking for destinations and health services outside of their country.

The role of the state, in addition to supervisory, could also be investment, that is to contribute with infrastructure and advisory services to attract investors, could give incentives to specific areas that have spa baths, to develop luxury accommodation, spa, golf courses, and other tourist activities. Greece can develop medical, dental, healing, therapeutic, gastronomic and athletic tourism, not only for people with disabilities but also for other patients (hemodialysis centers). A big bet for the country is the development of the ambient assistant living abroad, attracting older people who

need high-quality infrastructure and special care (Caballero-Danell, & Mugomba, 2006).

Tourist health centers can be considered as the most representative form of health tourism installation. They can grow in areas where there are spas, but also in others that do not exist. Typically, they are installed in areas of special natural beauty, where other alternative forms of tourism can be developed. Hydrotherapy can be used, despite the lack of healing water, which is now made with common water, enriched with various flavors, various chemical elements and pharmaceutical impurities.

Special health programs, as well as health-related programs, such as various prevention, retention, treatment, recovery and rehabilitation programs, are implemented in health resorts. Pleasant with these modern centers is that they can be an ideal destination for people with disabilities and for people with chronic conditions.

In our country, in the context of social tourism, health centers are chosen as tourist destinations. Until now, few private health tourism centers have been set up in Greece, since, as mentioned above, the state is not funding for their creation. The positive thing is that the funds of the Greek patients-tourists mostly cover the expenses. In Crete, the "MEDITERRANEAN" center, which was constructed from private funds and is a model of an artificial kidney, operates in Crete.

The unit was established in 2000 and it is estimated that 1,700 foreigners and 200 Greeks with nephropathy, with an average stay of 11 nights each, are accommodated. Including patients' escorts, overnight stays amount to 47,000 by the beginning of 2007. According to the Panhellenic Association of Nephropaths, the number of Greeks on dialysis is currently 7,800. Nephropaths, given their specific medical

needs, are part of the market with great prospects of harnessing the potential of Health Tourism. Other kidney units have been established in Greece, located in Messina, Kallithea and Chalkida (Deloitte, 2008).

The 1200m² ultra-modern building, located in a privately-owned 4-storey building in Messina, in a green environment, caters to the heavily populated visitors of the Southwest Peloponnese since February 2009. Campaigns from these centers are made from time to time to attract tourists from foreign countries , as they choose other countries such as Turkey, Spain and Morocco as their destination. A modern example of Health Tourism in Greece that works as an ophthalmological center and started a strategic partnership with Aldemar in Crete is "EMMETROPIA". It performs about 1,000 refractive treatments per year, with 27% of patients coming from outside Crete and 12% outside Greece.

"EMMETROPIA" deals with ophthalmology - a one-day service such as Dental and Plastic Surgery, which is painless and short, can be combined with a few days of recovery in several existing resorts. It is the only clinic in Crete and one of the few in Europe that has at the same time two different lasers of the last generation, with the possibility of both individualized interventions depending on the specificity of each eye. Laser refractive surgery treats myopia, astigmatism, hypermetropia and, lastly, presbyopia.

These procedures require strict preoperative testing lasting 2-3 hours. During preoperative testing, a visual examination of both the visual and the visual system is performed to determine whether or not the patient is fit for refractive surgery.

The surgery lasts about 10 minutes for each eye. It only takes two drops of local anesthetic and is generally painless. It is not tiring for the patient as he is lying on a

comfortable anatomical bed and can talk to his surgeon almost throughout the procedure.

Recovery is quick. In the first hours after surgery, the eyes are somewhat irritated, with a feeling of strange body and tears. Usually, during this time, vision is blurred. After twelve hours the irritation stops and vision begins to improve significantly. The next day of the operation the irritation has completely disappeared and vision has become almost perfect.

The first mandatory post-operative checkup is performed at Emmetropia Clinic within 24 hours after surgery. After the 24-hour visit, the patient should undergo three further post-operative check-ups. Each post-operative check-up takes about 15 minutes and helps assess the subsequent course of the eye and any infections. The main remarks of the refractive center management on the existing institutional framework are the non-existent legal framework for Health Tourism and the lack of a responsible state support body for the reinforcement (emmetropia.gr, 2018),(Deloitte, 2008).

Medical conferences in Greece

A sector with so much rampant growth as medical tourism could not be promoted and supported by a series of conferences and other organizations. As it is logical, both scientists and business stakeholders have identified the need to organize conferences for discussing issues related to medical tourism. At the same time it will be an opportunity for a meeting of executives from every corner of the world.

The conferences are a combination of discussions on practical issues related to health tourism, as well as the exposure of some companies already active in the sector. The

participants include hospitals, private clinics, thalassotherapy centers, insurance companies and travel agencies from all over the world.

So far, in Greece, due to the fact that the phenomenon of "Medical Tourism" is quite new, there are slow moves on the issue. That is why there was a delay in the organization of the first meetings (Ikkos, 2002).

The most important element of the meetings is the objective of bringing together the suppliers of medical tourism services with the corporate buyers of these services and not with the individual consumers. Indeed, there is an attempt to promote Business to Business sales (Visitcyprus.biz, 2018).

On March 8, 2015, the first conference on medical tourism was held, under the auspices of the Med-Professionals Network of Specialists in Athens Titania Hotel. The aim of the conference was to establish Greece as a competitive gold destination for health travelers, but also to remedy the disadvantages that hinder the development of medical tourism both at national and international level. Representatives of other countries, including China and Russia, were also present at the conference (Enikonomia.gr, 2018).

The second conference took place on April 16-17, at the DYO Forum 2016, at the Metropolitan Expo conference center where more than 4,000 physicians and 3000 pharmacists from all over Greece participated with free admission for all participants. (Enikonomia.gr, 2018).

The First Steering Committee has undertaken the third conference in order to contribute actively to the strengthening of medical tourism in our country, KEDE in cooperation with the Municipality of Ithaca and the support of the Athens Medical Association organize in Ithaca on 26 and 27 May 2017 a Special Thematic

Conference with topic: "Health Tourism: A Leader of Development of the National Economy and Emerging Greece in a Top Destination, 12 Months Per Year" (Enikonomia.gr, 2018).

IMTJ Medical Travel Summit 2018 will be held in Athens from 21 to 24 May 2018. The conference is supported by ELITOUR, the official Council of Hellenic Medical Tourism, an initiative of health groups and companies in the field of health, transport, tourism, insurance and advertising, covering the full range of medical tourism services in Greece. This is the first successful collective effort to promote Greece as a top destination on the map of international medical tourism.

IMTJ Medical Travel Summit will bring together the best in the field, who will share their knowledge and experience by ensuring the long-term development of this industry (TornosNews.GR, 2018).

Prospects for health tourism in Greece

The prospects of the industry in Greece are optimistic. This is guided by factors such as the mild climate of certain geographical areas of Greece. In addition, domestic and foreign capital is a major investment in health and tourism. Another positive element in this direction is the creation of a single European consciousness through the implementation of a common policy within the Member States of the European Union (Ikkos, 2002).

The European Union and its market are constantly expanding, and this means that the movement of capital and people is facilitated within its limits. Also, the costs of health tourism centers are covered by existing (Community) legislation by the insurance funds, by passing many legal obstacles. In this direction, the Greek state

intends to facilitate development efforts by providing incentives for the establishment, expansion and modernization of infrastructures and facilities for special tourist infrastructure that enhance thematic forms of tourism. At the same time, the Ministry of Tourism develops a new draft law on health tourism and spa tourism in order to complete the legal framework for development, the basis of which is laid down in the Development Law (Deloitte, 2008).

Health tourism can also be beneficial to local communities. The need for artificial kidney units is large, especially in the periphery. Local hospitals can not meet existing needs and thus large waiting lists are formed in artificial kidney units. The creation of artificial kidney units can provide services to native nephropaths and hospitality to their relatives, even in tourist seasons, achieving great occupancy throughout the year.

Scientific studies on modern lifestyle and diet show that 1,000,000 Greeks are at risk of severe kidney damage, 20% of whom may require dialysis in the future. These predictions lead to the conclusion that the needs for dialysis units will increase sharply in the future and this will create a new market segment. The faster growth among the types of Health Tourism is noted in the case of Wellness Tourism. Particular attention should be paid to Medical Tourism, since there is a large part of the market which, as a matter of course, perceives as a prime necessity the treatment and secondary tourism.

The distribution of the product, however, remains overwhelmingly in favor of Wellness Tourism. In Spain, Medical Tourism is not being promoted, unlike Thermal, which occupies around 95% of the market. The same is true of Portugal, where the prospects for health tourism development are practically non-existent. On the contrary, in Belgium, which is a key destination for surgical interventions and

rehabilitation, Medical Tourism prevails. It can be seen, therefore, that in countries where there are appropriate climatic conditions, and of course the required thermal springs, there is a greater investment in spa tourism and, consequently, wellness tourism.

In some of them, already, strong purchasing consciousness has already been created. In Russia, 10% of tourists visit spa tourism centers, while one in fifteen Russians goes to thermal resorts, as there is a large influx of foreigners, while in Hungary, which has about 350 thermal springs, the percentage of visitors is the same. In Germany, Italy, France, preventative medicine relies heavily on hydrotherapy from younger ages. In Greece, the conditions for enriched Health Tourism products have matured due to the fall in traffic in the spa tourism sector (intense competition from abroad and inadequate advertising of the product), but also the modernization of the product with investments from domestic capital.

An indispensable ingredient for the success of the effort is the better development and distribution of the product, the lack of which is regrettably given as the country's advertising focus is on the natural beauties of the place. In contrast, in countries such as Switzerland, Austria, Romania, Cyprus and Lebanon, key elements of the tourism chain, including airlines, are used to promote Health Tourism services. For Greece, the categories of medical tourism that can flourish are: Plastic surgery, cardiac surgery, organ transplantation, oncology services, ophthalmology, dentistry, servicing patients with renal insufficiency, patients with respiratory diseases (eg asthma) , patients with chronic conditions, the elderly not well served, people with disabilities and special needs (health- tourism.com, 2018).

As it is emphasized, Greece fulfills all the prerequisites for the development of Medical Tourism, as it has ideal environmental and climatic conditions, model hotel infrastructure and developed tourist network, national structures in the health system that support Medical Tourism. In advanced countries, the Health System is highly patrolled and is based on state or private insurance. At the same time, the procedures that mediate patient care are particularly time consuming, as there are huge waiting lists.

It is clear that lower cost and minimization of waiting compensate for the low quality offered in the minds of prospective customers. This sector is expected to grow further as long as the procedures for mutual recognition of insurance are delayed and the problems posed by the insurance funds of advanced countries are resolved.

Incentives for new projects

The state, at this time when the global economic crisis is directly affecting tourism, can move quickly to anticipate developments. What experts suggest are to motivate the transformation of hotel units into Health Tourism Centers as well as new projects in the field of tourist real estate such as integrated units that will have a high quality hotel, specialized medical services and finally proposals for post-medical (sports tourism with various sports, development of local cuisine, etc.) The alliance for the development of health tourism has already mobilized many sectors who need to move quickly. Medical groups, construction companies, real estate companies, insurance companies and tour operators who will find clients abroad.

Views on state grants and standards for setting up health tourism centers

Particularly high performance and profit indices are recorded in world health tourism, attracting large investments. According to data presented in an interesting study carried out on behalf of the xenia exhibition, 19,000,000 travels in the health tourism sector were carried out worldwide in 2005, according to studies by Tourism Research and Marketing in 2010, reaching 40,000 .000 per year and market share reached 4% of international travel (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2010).

According to the draft of the Joint Ministerial Decision, the Health Tourism Centers in Greece are classified as "special tourist infrastructure facilities", such as those set out in Tourism Law 2160/93, thus having the possibility of subsidies from the Development Law in a percentage of 30% - 40%, depending on the area where the investment will be made or, alternatively, benefit from tax exemptions and subsidies for creative employment. Health tourism centers will combine the possibility of holiday with preventive, curative and other treatments that are associated with chronic health problems (CBO, 2010).

The general specifications of such a center include: For the hotel department the minimum requirements for 4 or 5 star facilities with a minimum capacity of 150 beds and increased facilities for disabled persons (to be served by at least 40% of all rooms). For the health department, the application of specific provisions to individual departments: primary care units for health tourism centers, chronic dialysis units, recovery and rehabilitation centers, clinics. The sport sector will also be important as sports facilities are needed to complement the health department and enrich the "product offered" (Lunt, & Smith, &Exworthy, & Green, & Horsfall, & Mannion, 2011).

Medical tourism Cluster of the Macedonian Region

There are some obstacles to overcome in order to achieve the objective of strengthening medical tourism and in particular the situation in the country, with the prolonged recession and economic contraction, excessive and exhaustive tax burden, inability to access loans and financial capital, which have led several businesses, are unable to integrate technological and organizational innovations such as upgrading equipment, access to specialized services, and monitoring of international developments and the ability to deliver services on international markets (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2010).

In order to develop medical tourism, the cooperation and development of business synergies of all related and complementary sectors will be created, so that a network of economic cooperation will be established, with the aim of investing value added in medical tourism services; there are five comparative advantages of the Region of Central Macedonia for to serve the needs of medical tourism, excellent climate, the hotel's regular facilities, the number of combined tourist services, exceptional accessibility, with the extensive road network, Macedonia Airport and the Port of Thessaloniki, medical infrastructure (mainly private), as well as rehabilitation centers and thermal springs (MEDIGO Blog, 2018).

The creation of a medical tourism cluster in the region of Macedonia

The creation of a medical tourism cluster is a prerequisite for the Region of Central Macedonia to become the center for this specific form of tourism and thus to attract a

large tourist community with a special interest, a form of tourism that has seen a remarkable rise in recent years worldwide.

The aim is to strengthen medical tourism, as the region has the comparative advantages in order to serve this particular form of tourism. Medical tourism can bring significant income to Thessaloniki and Central Macedonia and it is part of the two structural characteristics of differentiation and specialization of the local tourist product (Cormany, & Baloglu, 2010).

The creation of the Medical Tourism Cluster will contribute to the economic growth of enterprises, to the preservation and especially to the growth of jobs and, more generally, to the improvement of the standard of living in the Region of Central Macedonia. Through the formation of stable and close cooperative links and structures, the transfer and exchange of knowledge, the development of human resources skills, the complementary and combined actions, as well as the creation of economies of scale for the enterprises of Central Macedonia, in the sectors of health and tourism really become pioneers (Caballero-Danell, & Mugomba, 2006).

Medical tourism is relatively new but rapidly expanding trend in the health and tourism sectors, which occupies an increasing share of the international market, showing significant growth and prospects for the future.

At the same time, other alternative forms such as rehabilitation tourism, wellness tourism, as well as specialized tourist products are being developed, targeting mainly the elderly audience and people with disabilities. Even European countries such as Germany, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom, as well as countries like the USA, Japan, Singapore and South Korea, are implementing strategies for the

promotion and development of medical tourism infrastructure and rehabilitation and wellness tourism (CBO, 2010).

The implementation of corresponding strategies and actions to strengthen medical tourism in the country could lead to multiplier benefits for the economy, new money in the market, new jobs and income for the national economy.

The position of the area of Thessaloniki in the medical tourism industry of Greece

Thessaloniki, with Khalkidhiki next to it, can become a Health Tourism Center, a tourism that does not know summer and winter.

For the development of medical tourism, Thessaloniki needs a strategic plan. It is not enough to have an institutional framework, not just certification. It has to invest in specific areas that have and can be highly skilled. Also referring to the very important tradition of Thessaloniki, neurosurgery and transplantation.

Thessaloniki is ideally geographically positioned, it is an international transport hub, it has high quality infrastructure both in the health sector and in the tourism sector, as well as very high quality trained medical and nursing human resources.

The Minister of Tourism, Olga Kefaloyiannis(2012-2015) , referred to opening a conference on "Medical Tourism in Practice - Thessaloniki", co-organized by the Hellenic Chamber of Commerce with the ministries of tourism and health (The prospects of Thessaloniki in MedicalTourism , 2018).

In this effort, EOPYY, the largest European Health Service Organization, seeks to act as a business umbrella for foreign markets, such as the EOT for tourism businesses.

Moreover, it also operates in cooperation with the Greek National Tourism Organization (EOT), as medical and thermal tourism offers integrated packages in the foreign markets (CBO, 2010).

Thessaloniki is competitive in the quality of its services but also at prices. It can attract surgical incidents from the northern European countries where the waiting lists exceed 8-10 months. It can also serve nephropathy who have to do diarrhea, assisted fertility / extracorporeal, hair transplants and plastic surgery, while Germany has shown interest in geriatric care units as well. (Voria.gr, 2018)

The bidding factors are:

- Medical infrastructure (mainly private), as well as rehabilitation centers and thermal springs
- Specialized medical and nursing staff
- Excellent hotel facilities
- A wealth of combined tourist services
- Excellent accessibility, with the extensive road network, Macedonia Airport and the Port of Thessaloniki
- Climatic conditions, infrastructure, service quality, historical and cultural heritage
- Developing international certification standards for infrastructure health care.
- Internet use. The Internet is proving today the most prevalent channel which allows people to seek information on health issues and health care.
- Increasing private health service providers. Given that governments are battling with the pressure it causes underfunding in health services, health care

private sector organizations will get a larger share of that market, and gradually acquire more international than national roll.

- Insurance products that provide security packages at lower costs become more and more pronounced.

Demand factors are:

- Demographic changes. It is estimated that over the next 50 years a large percentage of people over 60 ,in developed countries ,will rises from 1/5 to 1/3. The sections of tourism that concern health, thalassotherapy and fitness - wellness are expected to benefit.
- The increase in life expectancy is translated into healthcare needs and the states are not now able to finance this increase.
- High queues in public hospitals of developed countries (USA, Western Europe) favor the growth of medical tourism (Cluster of medical tourism from the Region of Central Macedonia,, 2018).

Primary registration of existing health tourism infrastructure in the region of Thessaloniki

Distinct public hospital units such as the Papageorgiou Hospital and General Military Education Hospital are distinguished. Moreover, 424,Military Hospital, which is well-organized, with modern equipments, is comparable to those from abroad and offers the totality of high-quality health services both at primary, secondary and tertiary level. As well, both the bone marrow transplantation unit of Papanikolaou Hospital and St. Paul's hyperbaric medicine unit are international and are already attracting patients from all over the world.

There is, also, an abundance of diagnostic centers, clinics, maternity clinics, microbiological laboratories, and dental offices.

Furthermore, areas of artificial reproduction and hemodialysis units in the region of Central Macedonia, and in terms of rehabilitation and well-being tourism, it is highlighted the high concentration of private centers with extremely high-level infrastructure, special and advanced technology equipment and excellent scientific staff. Some of them are unique in the Balkans and comparable to the best European (Cluster of medical tourism from the Region of Central Macedonia, 2018).

Categories of medical units in Thessaloniki

Public Hospitals

Today, Public Hospitals of Thessaloniki have only a part of the total hospital beds in operation. For this reason, this figure is unable to meet the growing demand for health services. Epidemiological characteristics of the population (aging, increase in the number of chronically ill patients due to increased age limits, etc.), factors related to private health insurance, prices of services provided by private bodies and occupational disease indicators of private hospitals, as the case may be .

Under-funding and reduced liquidity of healthcare system is a serious deficit that is seriously threatening in the day our availability of health services and their quality these services, which is in the face of modern challenges - such as have already been described - in the context of Cross-Border Care and liberalization of the health sector, makesThessaloniki's position further disadvantageous.

Typically, we report the hospitals that deal with these problems:

1. Anti-Cancer "Theagenio" Hospital
2. Hospital "AgiosDimitrios"
3. University Hospital "AHEPA"
4. St. Paul's Hospital
5. "Papageorgiou" general hospital
6. General Hospital "Gennimata"
7. General Hospital "Ippokratio"
8. Psychiatric Hospital
9. Special Hospital for Aphrodisiacs & Skin Diseases
10. 424 Military Hospital

Private Clinics & Hospitals

Private clinics are the largest number of small or medium-sized clinics nursing units with a limited number of beds. The average beds per private clinic is about 80. A small number of private hospitals operates with a significant number of developed beds and an expanded range of specialized medical services, demonstrating important steps in the private health care sector. Despite most clinics depend on public insurers organizations that keep prices low while they are difficult to move on contracting with private insurance companies because of that they cannot usually meet the high demand service quality (MEDIGO Blog, 2018).

Thus, private clinics are mainly two categories:

The first category includes a very large number of small nursing staff units that their viability is doubtful because of their inability to deal with the difficulties of repaying public debts insurance companies of the last two years towards them and at the same

time the growing demand for clean and quality upgraded services health. Over the past five years until the financial crisis, the small ones and medium-sized clinics have made significant investments for the modernization of their infrastructure and medical equipment expecting to strengthen their market share.

It is noted that these clinics are significantly dependent on their outcome funds from social security funds (mainly the EOPYY in this case) where at times in many cases pricing services is ultimately lower than the cost.

In the second category belong, though few in number, large multipurpose clinics located mainly in Thessaloniki.

These units are well organized with modern equipments matching them of those abroad and offer all the services to both primary and secondary care.

Network of Services - NORTHERN GREECE

Medical Inter-Balkan Center of Thessaloniki

The Medical Center in Thessaloniki is housed in a unique aesthetic functional building. It is ergonomically designed for the better care and security for the patient. On a total covered area of 50,000 square meters, with a capacity of 380 nursing beds, has 22 surgical rooms as well as wards and facilities that cover the entire range of health services. They are equipped, as a whole, with the most modern medical, diagnostic and latest generation of laboratory equipment (CBO, 2010).

The Medical Inter-Balkan of Thessaloniki ensures excellent conditions nursing, introducing innovative minimization systems of in-hospital infections and a sense of security for residents of the wider region and not only. Staffed with leading doctors

each specialty, enabling them to practice high medicine in scientifically ideal conditions, and with the most experienced health executives in nursing and administration, applies certified systems ISO 9001: 2000 Quality Management at the Intensive Care Unit and in the Central Laboratories. Also the main kitchen is certified against HACCP.

Among its specialized units are: the sophisticated Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinic, the specialized Pediatric Center and the pioneering Oncology Center, the only Oncology clinic Valid Council and ensures multifaceted and integrated treatment of the patient (Interbalkcenterthessaloniki, 2018).

Euromedica Group

The EUROMEDICA Group, founded in 1989 by a group of 65 distinguished is active in the health sector, and since 1994 is listed on the Athens Stock Exchange. With 51 large multiples Diagnostic Centers with departments of all medical specialties, 18 clinics, 9 rehabilitation clinics and 1 Spa-Hygiene & Rehabilitation Center, with a total capacity of 1,621 beds, is now the widest developed Private Primary and Secondary Provider care in our country. The main features of this integrated health network are broad geographical dispersion, proper organization, joint management, transport know-how, complementarity of activities, single scientific direction, high specialization, high medical and medical nursing staff, state-of-the-art technological equipment, development, modernization, continuous upgrading and development.

EUROMEDICA Service Network-Thessaloniki

- GENESIS CLINIC
- KIANOS STAVROS CLINIC
- EUROMEDICA GENERAL CLINIC
- EUROMEDICA CENTRAL CLINIC
- EUROMEDICA AROGI RECOVERY CENTER

(Euromedica.gr, 2018)

Conclusions

Thessaloniki is located in the west of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki and at the edge of the Thermaic Gulf, it is the most important transport hub of Northern Greece, since has a motorways and a railway for Europe while its harbor creates a crossroads between Greece and its countries the rest of south-eastern Europe (thessaloniki-gold 2012 , 2012). The Prefecture of Thessaloniki has an area of 3.683, and a population of 878.194 and is divided into 43 Municipalities, located in central Macedonia and is washed by the Thermaic Gulf in the west and the Strymonikos Gulf in the east.

It is a tourist destination of many foreign tourists because it is a beautiful city with a long history that extends over the centuries. During the Byzantine years, Thessaloniki was an important center and its flowering at that time is still evident throughout the city. There are many places that will attract the interest of foreign tourists as well as many museums and remarkable Byzantine churches. However, in recent years there has been a concerted effort by the Region to promote the Prefecture and to promote the tourist potential of the region (Experas newspaper, 2013). Thessaloniki was oriented towards domestic tourism, mainly commercial. The stagnation of tourism in Thessaloniki has in recent years been combined with a significant increase in the hotel's potential. Specifically, overnight stays in the Municipality the of Thessaloniki in 1995 were about 1.1 million, in 2000 about 1.2 million, and in 2005 also 1.2 million, while the number of hotel beds in the city showed a small decrease from 6.512 in 6,340 between 1995 and 2000, increased significantly to 2005 to 7,514. This increase was mainly in the 4 and 5-star hotels, while in the lower 2 and 1-star categories there was a decrease. Similarly, for the Prefecture of Thessaloniki, overnight stays increased from 1.25 million in 1995 to 1.6 million in 2000 and remained stable until 2005. On the contrary, the number of beds in the Prefecture

increased from 8,655 in 1995 to 10,166 in 2000 and 12,433 in 2005. At the Prefecture level, almost the whole increase is due to the increase of beds in 4 and 5 star hotels. But the consequence of the significant increase in supply in relation to stagnant demand was the decline in the number of services. So the bed occupancy level. In 2012 the proportion of Greek and foreign tourists stood at 60% and 40% respectively, in 2013 it is estimated to be 50% -50%. In 2013 there is mainly an increase in arrivals from Russia, Turkey and Israel, while the presence of Cypriot visitors is also important. According to the latest figures from the Hoteliers Association of Thessaloniki, already in the first six months of 2013, the overnight stays of the Russians reached 35,698 against (Possibilities and Conditions of Tourism Development in Thessaloniki, 2007).

Last year, the number of overnight stays was 22,007, an increase of 62.21%. As noted by the hoteliers of Thessaloniki, 9.65% was recorded, with the overnight stays being on the second place in the ranking of foreign visitors 31.765 compared to 28,969 in 2012. The Turks ranked third, with 28,556 overnight stays this year from 19,025 last year (an increase of 50,10%) and fourth place the Israelis, which grew by 67,92% (26,854 from 15,992 last year). Rise is recorded simultaneously for the first time in four years and to Greek travelers. The increase in the number of nights spent by Greeks in hotels in Thessaloniki in the first half of 2013 (January - June) amounts to 6.67%. As the Union figures show, the overnight stays of Greeks amounted to 452,848 from 424,551 in the same period last year.

Thessaloniki has a big advantage in its hands to develop competitively in the field of medical tourism, the Community Directive 24/2011, which allows all European citizens to be hospitalized in our country.

Thessaloniki and Greece, in the field of medical tourism, will find Turkey and Hungary by investing in it and offering lower prices. On the other hand, Greece in the health sector has lower prices than other European countries for high-level services and infrastructure. Greece may choose to provide services in specialties requiring lighter infrastructure, such as patient rehabilitation, plastic-aesthetic surgery, ophthalmology, dentistry, undergoing fertility, as well as cardiac surgery and transplantation.

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